

# EVALUATING THE SYTEM OF POWER SHARING ETHIOPIA IN LIGHT OF AREND LIJPHART'S MODEL OF POWER SHARING

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## Abstract

Ethiopia has deep linguistic and religious diversities. Because of lack of accommodation of these diversities the country was plagued by internal conflicts and civil wars. True, power sharing is very essential to any accommodation of deep diversities. The goal of this paper is evaluate the system of power-sharing in Ethiopia in light of the Arend Lijphart's theory of power sharing. It identifies power-sharing as the most fundamental conflict management strategy adopted to deal with diversities. The article argues that the Ethiopia's power-sharing model, which is largely consociational, is less suitable to Ethiopia as compared to more centripetal model of power-sharing.

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**Keywords:** Diversities, power-sharing, Ethiopia, consociational, centripetalism

## Introduction

Ethiopia is deeply divided country with several languages, cultures and religions. Some of these ethno-linguistic groups live in a contiguous territory. In the past, highly centrist authoritarian regimes pursued assimilations policies to deal with these diversities (Clapham, 1988). However, since 1991 the new government adopted powers-haring and accommodation of deep diversities as a strategy to manage diversity. In 1995 when the new constitution was drafted, Ethiopia started with a bold experiment. This bold experiment was recognition, an insistence that the country is not going to see its diversity as a problem. Rather it is going to foreground its diversity.

The prevailing wisdom at that time in Africa in general and Ethiopia in particular was that diversities should not be emphasized because it will make the state unstable. The decision to forge unity in diversity was actually the cumulative wisdom of the Ethiopian left since 1960s. The ruling EPRDF as heir to Ethiopian Student Movement, has long decided that Ethiopia can

only hold if it foregrounds its deep diversities. This was why the Transitional Government (1991-1995) which was dominated by EPRDF took bold measures towards decentralization and self-determination for Ethiopia's ethnic groups. So by the time the 1995 constitution was drafted the most fundamental decisions about Ethiopia's diversities have already been a settled affair. There was an almost consensus among the members of the constitutive assembly that Ethiopia can only be united in diversity. The minority opinion, however, was that the federal system should be territorial, and should not be ethnic-based. In a sense, this at that time was a very risky venture.

This article is organised in to three parts. Following this introductory section is the second section that reflects on the different models of power-sharing. The third part examines the power-sharing arrangement in Ethiopia. The paper ends with fourth section with a conclusion.

### **Power-sharing arrangements**

This part will briefly discuss the major models of power sharing arrangements. Power-sharing can simply defined as the act of providing 'every significant identity group or segment in a society representation and decision-making abilities on common issues and a degree of autonomy over issues of importance to the group' (Sisk, 1996:5). There are different types of power-sharing arrangements depending on the conditions of each country.

One of these models is consociationalism. The most popular expression "consociational democracy" was developed by Lijphart. Consociational theory purports that stability can be reached in divided societies through the adoption, development and institutionalization of a power-sharing model which aims at taming and restructuring intrinsic fault lines. consociationalism is directly linked to elite behavior and to what Lijphart calls 'the self-negating prophecy'. Aware of underlying centrifugal threats, political elites can purposefully create channels of cooperation and manage destabilizing structures that threaten to fling the system into unruly waters. In other words, elites develop and internalize conflict-regulating strategies so as to counteract the dangers of division.

Consociationalism in particular aims at achieving stability in divided societies through the adoption and institutionalisation of power-sharing models by taming and restructuring intrinsic fault lines. Consociationalism is directly linked to elite behaviour. Aware of the underlying centrifugal threats, political elites can purposefully create channels of communication. They develop and internalise conflict-regulating strategies so as to counteract the dangers of division (Ibid).

For consociational democracy to succeed, Lijphart outlined four prerequisites based on elite active behaviour and accommodation: Leaders should be aware of the dangers waiting beneath the system, they should commit to preserving the system, they should be able to surpass segmental cleavages at the top, and they should be able to work out appropriate solutions to various communal problems.

Consociationalism has four elements (Lijphart, 1977: 16):

1. Grand executive coalition representing different societal segments: elites come together in the interests of the whole society.
2. Mutual veto: which allows groups to reject decisions detrimental to their interests
3. Proportionality: proportionality rules as a governing principle in political representation, civil service appointments, and allocation of public funds.
4. Segmented autonomy: segmented autonomy in education, linguistic, cultural and legal affairs.

In his recent writings, Lijphart considers grand coalition and segmental autonomy as the two core components of consociational democracy, and argues that proportionality and mutual veto act as complementary characteristics which improve the quality of power-sharing and enhance inter-communal cooperation and cultural autonomy.

Such system complements the other power sharing tool is, i.e., federalism. Federalism as a system of government combining self-rule and shared rule at federal level is an effective mechanism for a shared political life. In such situations federalism is complemented by other tools of power sharing, such as (Lijphart, 1977: 25):

1. Electoral systems: proportional representation systems that represent also smaller minorities.
2. Party systems: ethnic congress party.
3. Executive: grand coalition all ethnic groups and the head of government adhering to all ethnic groups.
4. Second chambers: protecting minorities by giving over representation in law-making process.
5. Public administration: proportional representation of all different ethnic groups/professional bureaucracy with no special safeguards.

However, consociational model has been severely criticized for various theoretical and empirical reasons. The most damaging criticism revolves around Lijphart's 'self-negating prophecy'. It is generally argued that the enlightened role of the elite is amplified beyond bounds. The model has also been criticized for its lessened democratic element, as the model is built on elite supremacy and predominance over the followers. Another reservation is that the adoption of power-sharing devices may exacerbate

inter-segmental conflicts and tensions instead of pacifying them, as observed in deeply divided Iraqi society in which the enforcement of federal structures without an efficient and parallel approach to conflict-regulation has exacerbated inter-religious animosities. Moreover, the claim that elites are always enlightened and that they act in the best interest of their society is controversial.

The other model of power sharing is the incentivist model/centripetalism. This model is based on the criticism that consociationalism failed to highlight the incentives for elite cooperation and inter-group accommodation. Even if the elites commit themselves to consociational model, in competitive political environment, centrifugal forces coming from their followers and political opponents may easily undermine the durability of the agreement (Donald Horowitz, 1985). Then what is needed is to create incentives for sustained elite cooperation and inter-group accommodation. This can be done by modifications in federal system (creation of ethnically heterogeneous states –this will lead to interethnic relations that can ease hostilities at the national level; or give minorities at the federal level one state to become majority in one of the states, thereby compensating for their marginal influence; or proliferation of states to reduce parochial alignments and issues) and reforms in the electoral systems (Horowitz, 1999: 139-141).

According to centripetal model, instead of organising elite power, this approach aims to promote cooperation between the different groups in using an electoral system that encourages political representatives to find support outside of their own ethnic communities. Example, they can use multiple proportional vote system; this system, although maintains the consociational goal of reflecting the different communities in parliament, it strengthens centripetal trends in allowing elections of every group to cast their preferences for candidates of different communities. While seat pooling, as in consociationalism, entails the formation of post-election coalitions to secure legislative majority without giving such a coalition support in the electorate, vote pooling works at the lower level and favours centripetal tendencies against ethnic extremism. The centripetal approach aims to encourage moderation on ethnic issues, and thereby favours more ideological cleavages (Horowitz, 1985: 628).

### **Ethiopian model of dealing with diversities**

The Ethiopian model of dealing with deep diversities has a number of elements: the first is the constitutional protection of diversities. The right of self-determination is recognized. The right includes self-rule, linguistic and cultural rights, the right for fair representation and finally as a sovereign right to secede if they wish so. The second is a constitutional package for

power-sharing arrangements. Thirdly, there is an affirmation of official multilingualism. Previous governments adopted Amharic language as the only legitimate language to be used in all official functions. In contrast, the current government developed constitution and other laws which focus on the rights of nations and nationalities. The government follows what is called promotive language policy, as there is a promotion of several languages by giving some constitutional, administrative and legal guarantees. Among the models of language policy, it is clear that Ethiopia adopted an official multilingualism as a model of language policy, as there is recognition for all the languages spoken in the country. The constitution states that each nation, nationality and people has the right to preserve and guard its identity, develop its culture and history and use its own language. The Federal constitution makes Amharic working language of the Federal government, regional states may determine their respective languages (Article 5). Today, in addition to this, there are also many languages used as official languages at zonal and wereda levels. The Education and Training Policy (1994) provides that primary education should be given in nationality languages.

Finally, along with the above constitutional guarantees was a package of cultural policy, which is consciously non-assimilationist. The key symbols of state, from national anthem to everything reflect that the cultural policy foregrounds the country's diversities. The national anthem begins by talking about not Ethiopia but of the different units that constitutes Ethiopia. This is a way of saying that Ethiopia exists because of you.

The cultural policy of Ethiopia states that the policy ensures

- 1.[all] the languages,..., literature ... of the nations, nationalities, and peoples of Ethiopia receive equal recognition, respect and chance to development.
- 2.creating a favorable situation to carry out scientific research and inventory of the languages , oral literature. ...of the nations, nationalities, and peoples of Ethiopia and make them useful in development endeavour
- 3.providing the necessary professional assistance to the various nations, nationalities and peoples while making their choice of language (The Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture 2003)

The final and major focus of this paper is system of power-sharing.

### **Power-sharing in Ethiopian**

In Ethiopia, successive governments in the past tried to impose unity by force, but failed. As Okafore (2000:525) makes clear, 'violent, coercive unification and repressive homogenisation are morally and socially bankrupt.' Ethiopia had faced large scale ethnic violence and conflict, due to highly centralised system of governance that marginalized their marginalised

the socio-economic and cultural rights of the diverse ethnic groups within the country (Gebru Tareke, 1991:15).

Power sharing agreements have been widely used in Africa as paths out of civil war (Adejumobi, 2007: 37). As mentioned before, consociationalism claims that, all other things being equal, we would expect power-sharing regimes to be more stable, with greater participation and inclusiveness, more effective government, and a better record of democratic consolidation. Such system is most suitable for transitional and consolidating democracies struggling to achieve legitimacy and stability in plural societies. Both consociationalism and federalism expand the opportunities for ethnic groups to achieve elected office, a voice within government, and a stake in the political system (Ibid).

The process of power-sharing in Ethiopia corresponds to most of the elements of consociational and incentivist models of power-sharing (Horowitz 2002:23, 1991; and Lijphart 1977:16-25). The Ethiopian federal arrangement could be described as federal consociational one. The adoption of the federal system of government was meant to provide a proper balance between at least major ethnic groups, thereby holding a country united which was threatened by disintegrative forces. It is stated that the two major objectives of the Ethiopian federation are: To maintain the imposed unity through the constitutional recognition of diversities and to promote democracy by guaranteeing both individual and group rights. In short, it aimed at forging unity out of diversity (FDRE Constitution, Art 39 and 47).

The basic structure of power-sharing in Ethiopia covers three major dimensions – the territorial, fiscal and political. Federalism and the creation of states relates with the territorial dimension of power-sharing, while the fiscal dimension has to do with the revenue allocation system. Finally, the political dimension of power-sharing deals with the method of office distribution. The same dimensions of power-sharing are applied at the state level, especially in ethnically heterogeneous ones.

A parliamentary form of government is instituted at both federal and state levels. Apparently, this form of government was selected because there was a desire to make power a sharable good, which the presidential system does not. Sharing of power is essential to any accommodation of deep diversities. Therefore, parliamentary form of government which is coalition requiring and coalition sustaining was consciously selected to make sure that political power and resources are shared among the diverse nations and nationalities of Ethiopia.

The constitution gives the right every ethno-cultural community to create its own regional state, or when to have a governmental structure below regional governments. Accordingly, there are nine regional states and many special zones, districts, and neighbourhood associations, created to grant

special administrative status to minority ethno-cultural communities. Creation of representative regional and local governments facilitates sharing of territorial powers. The two forms of states creation prescribed by both the consociational and incentivist models can be identified in Ethiopia. Ethnically homogeneous states are created for geographically and demographically large ethnic groups like Oromo and Amhara. Ethnically heterogeneous states are also created to hold together several minority groups.

On the fiscal dimension, the revenue allocation system guides the process of allocation of financial resources. Revenue allocation process shows a desire to balance population size and fiscal need among the regions. Vertically, there is fiscal centralization, while revenue allocation is based on the principle of equality of states at horizontal level.

The political dimension of power-sharing is defined by office distribution at federal level. There is a system of fair and appropriate representation of ethnic communities at the federal level, commensurate with their relative numerical size. This representation is mostly evident in both houses of the federal parliament, the federal executive and judicial bodies (Article 39(3)). There is an informal arrangement in which each state of Ethiopia considered in the selection and recruitment into federal bureaucracy. These processes correspond to consociationalism's elite coalition and proportional representation. However, in Ethiopia coalition within the ruling party is conditional upon subscribing to the ruling party's membership and its ideology. So, political parties that do not subscribe to the ruling ideology of the ruling party could not share power. When it comes to minority veto, the Ethiopian model of power-sharing betrays the principle of consociationalism. Federal policymaking process is didn't provide for minority veto. In the Ethiopian federation, however, the right of secession is guaranteed as a right of minority veto.

### **Party level collation building**

Unlike almost all African countries (Adejumobi, 2007:32), there is no ban on ethnic parties in Ethiopia. In line with the argument of consociationalism, ethnic parties help diminish conflicts by channelling demands through legal channels. Of course, political parties that cross-cut cleavages and facilitate consensus, as is the case in Switzerland, are more suitable for national integration. But given Ethiopia's peculiar conditions, rather than catch-all parties ethnic congress parties are more appropriate.

The federal system has created institutional space that has encouraged the formation of ethnic parties, which compete mostly in local and regional elections.

Organizationally, the ruling EPRDF is a front founded by the union of political organisations representing the four major regions/ethnic groups “on the basis of equality”. All major party structures such as the congress, and the executive committee comprises equal number of representatives of member organizations (EPRDF Political Programme, 1993). So, clearly the EPRDF could be considered as a congress party or federation of ethnic parties. The party allocates party posts and government offices with at least quasi-consociational formulas.

I argue that the centripetal model, not consociational, is more appropriate to Ethiopia. In the Ethiopian model of power-sharing, as it stands now, lacks the necessary incentives for sustained elite cooperation and inter-group accommodation. Although there is no exact congruence between the territory of the states and the ethno-linguistic groups, there is attempt to grant a mother state to some of the dominant nationalities. This not only led to administratively inefficient structures but also reinforce the difference between the communities. In this case, there must be federal restructuring to make most states ethnically heterogonous. Besides, there needs to be proliferation of states by, in some cases, restoring historic provinces and organize them along federal lines. This will help for administrative convenience and most importantly, reduce parochial alignments. Furthermore, the current majoritarian electoral system and drawing of electoral constituencies needs to be reformed so as to create incentives for representatives to rely for votes outside of their ethnic communities. What is also lacking in Ethiopia is different approaches and strategies for the promotion of cross-party integration, example by using formation rules and electoral rules (Proclamation No. 33/2007), in line with the centripetalism.

## **Conclusion**

Arguably the Ethiopian system a consociational federal one, or at least that is what it wants to achieve. However, the system as it stands now faces few challenges. First, due to organisation of territories based on sole criteria of ethnicity, individuals living in a regional state not ethnically related to them have no same political right with members of the ethnic community. Second, the dominant party system makes regional states less autonomous. Compounding the problem is that some parties are seen as instruments of the central government rather than representatives of respective ethnic communities. As O’Leary demonstrates what matters for democratic consolidation ‘is meaningful cross-community executive power sharing in which each significant segment is represented in the government with at least plurality levels of support within its segment’ (O’Leary, 2005: 13).



The other problem is the lack of acceptance of the diverse nature of the country by some segments of the country. These groups are openly unsympathetic to the federal system, partly as a result of the lack of inclusiveness of the process of formation of the federal system. According to these groups, ethnic federalism would disintegrate the country (Bahru Zewde, 1991). This has been affecting national consensus and integration.

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### **Legislation**

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